

Proposed Emblems of Ancient Epicureans

Post by "Joshua" of July 11, 2023 at 11:13 PM

Lucretius



Proposed Emblems: Wormwood and Honey



Lucretius' lines on honey and wormwood appear twice in *De Rerum Natura*, most memorably in the poem to Book IV:

*For as physicians, when they seek to give
Young boys the nauseous wormwood, first do touch
The brim around the cup with the sweet juice
And yellow of the honey, in order that
The thoughtless age of boyhood be cajoled
As far as the lips, and meanwhile swallow down
The wormwood's bitter draught, and, though befooled,
Be yet not merely duped, but rather thus
Grow strong again with recreated health:
So now I too (since this my doctrine seems
In general somewhat woeful unto those
Who've had it not in hand, and since the crowd
Starts back from it in horror) have desired
To expound our doctrine unto thee in song
Soft-speaking and Pierian, and, as 'twere,
To touch it with sweet honey of the Muse-*

In Matthew Arnold's dichotomy between *Hellenism and Hebraism*, the honeybee gives us the symbols of the best of Greek culture--"[sweetness and light](#)", honey and wax candles. Wormwood has a somewhat darker history; it is the central ingredient in absinthe, the *green muse* or *green fairy*, the infernal drink of [poets](#).

In Lucretius these two emblems symbolize his entire project--the sweet golden honey of his beautiful verse, graced by the muse's touch, masking the bitter but healthful draught of true philosophy.

Feel free to share your suggestions! For Leontion I'm thinking the Lion and the Κάλαμος, or Reed Pen. I'll share my reasons for that tomorrow!

Post by “Joshua” of July 11, 2023 at 11:53 PM

Leontion



Proposed Emblems: Lion and Stylus (or Reed Pen)

[250px-Stylus.jpg](#)



Leontion's writing was commemorated in the Greek anthology, Planudean appendix #324:

ANONYMOUS: I, THE pencil, was silver when I came from the fire, but in thy hands I have become golden likewise. So, charming Leontion, hath Athena well gifted thee with supremacy in art, and Cypris [Aphrodite] with supremacy in beauty.

Cicero complains that Leontion took to writing a scroll against Theophrastus, successor to Aristotle, but revealingly reports that "she wrote well and in good Attic style". Our word 'style' comes from the Latin *stylus*, an instrument for writing in reusable wax tablets.

Post by “Godfrey” of July 12, 2023 at 12:35 AM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

In Lucretius these two emblems symbolize his entire project--the sweet golden honey of his beautiful verse, graced by the muse's touch, masking the bitter but healthful draught of true philosophy.

I was actually thinking today that another thing Lucretius was doing was that the first 7000+/- lines of *De Rerum Natura* are the honey and the plague of Athens is the wormwood.

Post by “Joshua” of July 12, 2023 at 12:53 AM

That is a very good point, [Godfrey!](#)

The Hymn to Venus at the top of the 'cup' is full of sweetness, and the Plague in the bottom full of bitterness.

Post by “Eikadistes” of July 12, 2023 at 11:26 AM

[Joshua](#) these are really great. For a long time now I have had this idea to create prayer candles with Epicurean figures on them, expressed using symbolic imagery as has been common in the visual arts throughout the ages.

I'm thinking of making a parallel between Catholic Saints and appropriate Epicurean figures that fulfill the same sort of social, historical, or spiritual role that Christian personalities do throughout Christian history.

The following are AI-generated, which I do **not** consider to be my intellectual property at this point as far as art goes, so I am just sharing these to share a sort of template, or ideal that I'd like to try to fulfill in doing so:



Post by "Eikadistes" of July 12, 2023 at 11:27 AM



Post by "Bryan" of July 12, 2023 at 1:57 PM

These are awesome Nate - thank you! What program are you using? I have not worked with AI images at all. Is Metrodorus in the mix or did I miss him? Thanks again!

Post by “Eikadistes” of July 12, 2023 at 4:35 PM

[Quote from Bryan](#)

These are awesome Nate - thank you! What program are you using? I have not worked with AI images at all. Is Metrodorus in the mix or did I miss him? Thanks again!

I have been playing with a text prompt on the Deep Dream Generator. I have not made a Metrodorus yet:

<<https://deepdreamgenerator.comhttps://http://deepdreamgenerator.com/generator>>

Post by “Bryan” of July 12, 2023 at 5:25 PM

This is fun! Without much prompting and only giving three different images of Metrodorus.... my first pass is not very good -- but I can see this having potential once I learn what I am doing!

Post by “Joshua” of July 12, 2023 at 7:18 PM

[Diogenes of Oenoanda](#)



Proposed Emblems: Hammer, Chisel, Carven Stone



"Now, since the remedies of the inscription reach a larger number of people, I wished to use this stoa to advertise publicly the medicines that bring salvation. These medicines we have put fully to the test; for we have dispelled the fears that grip us without justification, and, as for pains, those that are groundless we have completely excised, while those that are natural we have reduced to an absolute minimum, making their magnitude minute."

As a Roman-era evangelist of Epicureanism, Diogenes is second only to Lucretius in the scale of his ambition; but where the latter drew on his experience of nature to compose an intricate poem in the small hours by candlelight, the former staked out the contours of his project in the public square, hiring stonemasons to carve his inscription into a wall of rock.

Post by "Joshua" of July 12, 2023 at 7:53 PM

Philodemus of Gadara



Proposed Emblems: Vesuvius and Papyrus



(Papyrus plants)



*"To-morrow, dearest Piso, your friend, beloved by the Muses, who keeps our annual feast of the twentieth * invites you to come after the ninth hour to his simple cottage. If you miss udders and draughts of Chian wine, you will see at least sincere friends and you will hear things far sweeter than the land of the Phaeacians. But if you ever cast your eyes on me, Piso, we shall celebrate the twentieth richly instead of simply."*

If Leontion's pencil in the metaphor came silver from the fire, it is all the more remarkable that Philodemus' scrolls survived it intact--the largest library of its kind to survive in one great lump

from the ancient world.

Post by “Joshua” of July 12, 2023 at 9:38 PM

Here I have fleshed out most of the middle of the pack, but neither the lower end--the inconstant Horace? The youthful Epicurean Virgil contrasted with the grave imperialist Stoic poet of his maturity?--nor, with the exception of Lucretius, the top of the class; Epicurus, Metrodorus, Hermarchus, Polyaenus.

I'll sketch out my thoughts, but I have nothing solid.

- Polyaenus: "a kindly and just man" (D. L.), and a mathematician. The scales of justice, and the Canon, or measuring rod, for the geometer gone "rogue"?
- Hermarchus: the rooster and the archway; the rooster was the Greek symbol of the island of Lesbos where Hermarchus was born, and in mythology was once a young soldier whom Ares had posted at the door of the room where he and Aphrodite were otherwise occupied (some Lucretian imagery there). When Hephaistos found them out, Ares cursed the young soldier by turning him into a rooster, to raise the alarm forever at the coming of day. Hermarchus was the successor to Epicurus in the garden--the sentinel posted during a period of transition, as represented by a garden archway.
- Metrodorus: the guttered candle and the double herm. Metrodorus was born in Lampsacus on the Hellespont, the same strait of water made famous in the story of Hero and Leander, who lived on opposite sides. Every night Hero would light her lamp, and Leander would use it as a guide to swim across the sea. One night the wind guttered the lamp, and Leander lost his way and drowned. The double-herm of Epicurus and Metrodorus represents their close connection, and the guttered candle his untimely death.
- Horace: the pig and goblet. "Fat and sleek", wine-sodden poet....you get the idea.
- Plotina: the dove and the diadem. The dove as a symbol of both Venus and peace (her intercession on behalf of the Epicurean school), the diadem signifying royalty

Epicurus himself. The trickiest of the lot. Personally I like □ as previously proposed here on the forum (not by me), representing atoms (the dot), void (the empty space), and the tetrapharmakos (the four sides of the diamond, and the four surviving letters of the man himself--Herodotus, Pythocles, Menoeceus, and Idomeneus). Coins of Samos often featured a lion, but more typically a bull and peacock (symbols of patron goddess Hera), and an amphora of their legendary wine.

A boat or ferry, not to shepherd souls to the underworld, but to a life beyond fear of death; a skull or memento mori, a mortar and pestle, a piglet or wild boar, a fig tree or the myrtle of Aphrodite, an Ionic column, the shattered fetterlock, or the eye raised to the heavens as in

Lucretius.

The greatest symbol of all was his own portrait.